

SENTIMENT

Grand miniature

04.12.20 – 06.02.21

The miniature is a powerful machine for concentrating attention. Persian miniatures, for instance, those extraordinary masterpieces of sacred illustration, fascinate not only because of their execution and their drama, but because their reduced scale imposes a kind of physiological discipline on the person watching. To look at a miniature, you must focus your attention, and this alone generates a sensation of both intensity, and complicity. But this is not all. In the magnificent works of Reza Abbasi, for example, the density of composition is such that even the tiny saccadic movements that the eye involuntarily makes, as it flickers over the image, are enough to animate the image, to bestow upon it a life of its own.

Within the miniature, worlds emerge, because we already carry worlds within us. The intensity of focus that miniatures call forth acts as a bridge via which we project onto, or into, the world that they present. This is also the hidden eros of the aquarium: it is a self contained world, in which fish swim like thoughts. Its apparent triviality only makes it all the better a tool for private meditation. Brian Eno, it is said, composed the Windows 95 chime as a full length composition with multiple synths, and then compressed it to the duration of 3.25 seconds. Furthermore, he composed 84 pieces before he was satisfied with the result. It is, perhaps, the single most performed composition in history, the sound of what was, for some years, the global anthem of a triumphant corporation, a little victory fanfare, performed every time a computer restarted.

Sentiment's first exhibition, Grand Miniature, takes pleasure in the contradiction at the miniature's heart: true miniatures are not small. They contain worlds. A true miniature, small as it is, will always conceal cavities, and hold secrets into which you cannot see. It will have an interior life. Something within it moves when you are not looking. The products of private obsessions, of small scale elaboration, these miniatures are also manifestos. They are marquettes and models of future utopias and dystopias. Of worlds that, until now, have been nursed in isolation, tended over in bedrooms, and are now brought together into the same gallery space. Mathis Altmann's works are ultimately studies of the studio as a kind of battery in which the artist is an anode, and the things of the world cathodes, and particles stream from one to another, coating and suffocating each other. Peter Wächtler's models, but contrast, are beautiful nightmares from a silent past of tradition and betrayal, and traditions of betrayal. Stefania Carlotti's papiermachés are studies in psychological power. *I want a Reckless Life* shows a destroyed bar, but whether it has been destroyed by forces from within or without is not so easily determined. That they can be in the same room as Wächtler's models overnight astonishes me. Perhaps it is only the magisterial promise of Gina Fischli's cake that stops them from going to war with each other. Her cake, a fairytale castle, promises peace and plenty, only on the condition that the promise remains permanently unfulfilled. It may never be cut. But the paradisaical cake might, inadvertently, be attracting the wrong kind of visitors to Yannic Joray's room. This exhibition is not so much a simple show as a planetary system, even a kind of orrery, in which the artworks take positions both in space, and in relation to each other, as they sail through space and time. These miniatures not only look back at the viewer, they need to be quarantined from each other.

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